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Cover Photograph : An experience of Christian Unity — the closing service in the Lausanne Cathedral of the First European Ecumenical Youth Assembly, July, 1960.

The Word of God and the Church's Missionary Obedience

VICTOR E. W. HAYWARD

THIS study project, carefully so named in order to avoid a question-begging title, is nevertheless popularly referred to as our Theology of Mission Study. It has a considerable history. In 1948 the IMC Committee recognized the missionary obligation of the church as being a subject which called for fresh examination in the light of contemporary theological thinking. It was subsequently and consequently taken as the general theme of the IMC Enlarged Committee Meeting at Willingen in 1952.

In his introductory essay to the official report of that Meeting, "Missions under the Cross", Dr. Norman Goodall commented as follows: "It is important to note this particular starting-point and the assumptions belonging to it. The missionary obligation begins with the Gospel, not with theology. Its dynamic is met with in the realms of faith and obedience, of worship and personal commitment, more than in the field of speculation, reflection and intellectual enquiry. When, at Oegstgeest in 1948, the IMC Committee encouraged its Research Secretary to initiate correspondence and studies on the theological basis of missions, it was not assumed either that the missionary movement had lost touch with its original fount of inspiration or that the way to a more vivid and compelling experience of this power lay along the path of theological discussion. It was, nevertheless, recognized that in the fields of Biblical and theological studies there had been taking place, for some years, movements that were proving deeply significant for all who sought a fuller apprehension of the Christian faith.

At the same time, it was felt that these studies and movements of thought had not become related, with sufficient explicitness, to the missionary calling of the Church. Any vital movement in theology ought to affect and be affected by the Church's world-wide evangelistic obedience, yet at this very point it was evident that much had yet to be done before some of the most distinctive theological insights of our time could contribute to the re-formulation of a 'theology of missions'. Again, it was recognized at Oegstgeest, and amongst those who began to pursue this question, that the theological quest would not, of necessity and in itself, lead to the prophetic perception and utterance of the most compelling word about missions ; it was nevertheless believed that within fields of enquiry proper to theology there were many questions needing to be dealt with which affect most vitally the approach of a new generation to the abiding source of the missionary obligation. For such reasons as these 'The Missionary Obligation of the Church' became a subject of IMC research — the kind of research which endeavours to relate study and reflection to the most urgent practical tasks of the day."

In spite of a brave beginning, which produced some illuminating and stimulating material, it was discovered at the Willingen Meeting itself that far more work would be necessary before agreement could be reached on any adequate re-formulation of a theology of missions. The report of the group responsible for discussing theological issues was consequently "received" but not "adopted". Dr. Goodall concluded his article by listing four outstanding questions which obviously called for continuing study. Three of these remain problems in our present enquiry — what is the relation between 'history' and 'salvation history' ? What is the meaning of the necessity that the Gospel first be preached 'among all nations', before the End can come ? and What is the theological significance of 'foreign' missions within the total missionary responsibility of the Church ?

By the time the IMC Assembly met again, in Ghana in December 1957, not only had the need for fresh theological thinking in this sphere become still more obvious, but the confidence of the missionary movement in its own dynamic had also begun to be shaken. In a frank and penetrating analysis the late Professor Walter Freytag pointed out that whereas in the past Western Missions had always had many problems, they had now themselves become a problem. "We are uncertain about their patterns as they are ; and even more, the historic, basic conceptions of missions are being questioned." Yet just at the time when Western Missions were entering a period of radical self-criticism, Churches in Asia were embarking upon their own programme of foreign missions. In a yet deeper paradox, uncertainty concerning missions came at the very time when

the Churches generally showed themselves prepared to acknowledge mission as an essential dimension of the Church's whole existence upon earth.

As the preparatory stages of this study project developed, it was found to be very difficult to formulate a precise delimitation of the subject of enquiry. The problem is well explained in the following words from Bishop Stephen Neill: "If everything that the Church does is to be classed as 'mission', we shall have to find another term for the Church's particular responsibility for 'the heathen', those who have never yet heard the Name of Christ; and that, in 1959, means half the people now living on the earth. By reaction against this too general formulation, we are in danger of thinking really in terms of a theology of *missionary societies* and of *missionaries*, of a theological justification of what we have done in the past and of what we are trying to do in the present... Missionary societies, as we know them today, are in no sense a necessary part of the existence of the Church; they are simply temporary expedients for the performance of certain functions that could be performed in entirely different ways ... A correct theology of *the Church* would include everything that we now regard as the special and separate problems of 'missions'; and a correct theology of *ministry* would include everything that now perplexes us as the special problem of the 'foreign' missionary." (*Creative Tension*, pp. 81-82.) Were the study to become a vast essay in general ecclesiology or even in systematic theology at large, it would become too extensive and diffuse to illuminate the real issues. On the other hand, if the study were confined to the area in which the need for it had been most practically felt, namely, a theological basis for "foreign missions" as a specific element within the total mission of the Church, then its very terms might prejudice the answers. What was required was not an apologia for the past but a new creative approach to the future. Eventually the subject of enquiry was defined as follows: "What does it mean in theological terms and in practice in this ecumenical era for the Church to discharge its mission to all nations?"

It was of course desired that this study should be genuinely ecumenical. A strong feeling was however expressed in the Working Committee of the Department of Missionary Societies that the inevitable limitations of statements drawn up and agreed upon by a large number of persons would inhibit the creative work which was needed to give new inspiration as well as new direction in this time of "crisis of missions". In 1958 the WCC Central Committee decided to set up an international and interdenominational theological commission "of high competence" to deal with this subject. The Departmental Working Committee developed during its discussions in 1959 a scheme designed to combine,

within a fully ecumenical process, the best qualities of both group thinking and individual writing.

Dr. J. Blauw, of the Netherlands Missionary Council, was invited to write the draft of a study on the Biblical doctrine of the Church's mission to all the nations, to be based upon a survey and critical appraisal of recent theological work with any bearing upon this topic. Apart from Dr. Blauw's draft, other relevant material had already been prepared, such as the IMC Research Pamphlets entitled "Towards a Theology of Mission" by Wilhelm Anderson, and "Out of Every Nation : A discussion of the Internationalizing of Missions" by R. K. Orchard, and the booklet "One Body, One Gospel, One World" by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. It was agreed to make such preliminary studies the basis of a series of consultations in different parts of the world, to be attended by people of various nationalities, confessions, and responsibilities, who from first-hand experience of actual missionary work could bring into a fruitful mutual relationship theological reflection and knowledge of insights gained and problems encountered in the task itself. Dr. D. T. Niles, General Secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference, was invited to write a book setting out, in the light of this total series of consultations, the answers which he sees to the problems faced in this study. The first draft of this book is to form the working document for a meeting of the Commission itself at Bossey, from July 1-10 next year. It will be the task of that Commission to give the most rigorous scrutiny to the theology of Dr. Niles' book. Prior to their meeting, members of the Commission will also have received reports of the various consultations. Dr. Niles will be asked to re-write his book, in his own way, as a result of the discussions at Bossey, in which of course he will himself participate.

The Commission will be asked to report directly to the WCC Third Assembly, indicating both the agreements reached in the field of this enquiry and also those questions requiring yet further study. It had been hoped that the late Dr. John Baillie would chair this Commission. His recent death will be felt as a great loss in this connection, as in so many others. Dr. David Stowe, Educational Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, has been appointed as Secretary of the Commission, and is preparing the way for this important meeting next year. Among those who have already accepted invitations to membership are Professors T. Ariga, K. A. Busia, Nils Dahl, J. C. Hoekendijk, John Kalugirou, Carl Michalson and James Nichols.

It is impossible at this particular stage to foretell what will be the findings of this study. Dr. Blauw's draft has been written and translated into English. At a consultation in Geneva last July a large and representative group of the-

ologians from the European Continent, Scandinavia and Great Britain gave general approval to the document, as also did the Departmental Working Committee in August. It is now being revised and it is hoped to publish it next year in both Britain and America. Prior to the conference in Geneva, other official consultations had already been held in Greenwich (Connecticut), Hongkong (for participants from Hongkong, Japan, Korea, Philippines and Taiwan) and Singapore (for participants from Burma, Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore and Thailand). From September to November, Bishop Newbigin and Dr. M'Timkulu are holding a series of consultations in West, East and South Africa. A second consultation is planned in India (a brief one having already been held there), to which participants from Pakistan and Ceylon are to be invited. New Zealand has joined in the study, and Latin American co-operation has been sought.

Introducing his study, Dr. Blauw explains that he attempts simply "to set forth the *most important* results of the theological research of the last thirty years concerning the basis and the purpose, the place and the meaning of missions". As he justifiably protests, "in our day it has become impossible to give to any one person the task of surveying the whole field of knowledge of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and of systematic theology". Nevertheless, in twenty-nine pages of scholarly notes Dr. Blauw indicates how widely his net has in fact been cast. He seeks to give "a clear view of the missionary task of the church and especially of a 'theology of mission' in contrast to *and* in connection with a 'theology of evangelization' ". Perhaps a time will come again when we shall be so much under the discipline of the vocation of God that we shall no longer feel the need for a separate 'theology' of mission or of evangelization alongside a theology of the church ... It seemed better to me, finally, to set down several topics from the theology of the Old and New Testaments than to make an attempt myself to construct a 'theology of the Old and New Testament from the missionary viewpoint'. These topics, however, are chosen in such a way that together they form the 'theological study on the basis and meaning of the Church's mission to all the nations' which has been requested."

Dealing first with the O.T., Dr. Blauw starts, not with the Exodus, but with Gen. 1-11, on the basis that the kerygma of the O.T. must be understood from its own point of departure, which itself belongs to the witness of revelation. "The conviction that we are to look upon these beginning chapters not only as an adaptation of very old narrative material, but more especially as a 'theology of history', and as 'rückwärts gekehrte Prophetie' (prophecy turned backwards) is increasingly gaining ground. We shall therefore have to put aside the thought that we are being offered here an 'ontology' of creation and of man. We shall have to dispense with this philosophical terminology and mode of thinking,

in order not to lose sight of the true intentions of these very compact and charged chapters. Israel did not think and live philosophically, but historically; and the Old Testament, more than any other document from these times, has a historical prophetic character. As history, the Old Testament is prophecy; as prophecy, it is at the same time history". Thus it becomes clear "that the whole history of Israel is nothing but the continuation of God's dealings with the nations, and that therefore the history of Israel is only to be understood from the unsolved problem of the relation of God to the nations." Dr. Blauw deals with "election" and "the nations" from this starting point, emphasizing that in the O.T. the nations are always viewed as in concrete relationship with Israel, and that their ultimate recognition of Yahweh is "usually set forth as imperative and as future, as summons and as promise". He summarizes by quoting "one of the few systematic theologians who have given attention to the problem that confronts us", Karl Barth: "The history of Israel in her totality and in her context is universal prophecy. For the Old Testament makes it unmistakably clear, again and again, that it is precisely the covenant of Yahweh with a unique Israel, of Israel with a unique God ... — far from being an end in itself, far from getting one wrapped up in this particular relationship — has meaning, revelation, real and dynamic import for the relation between God and *all* peoples, *men* of all peoples."

Having established Universalism as the message of the O.T., Dr. Blauw proceeds in his second chapter to demonstrate that the specific idea of Mission "occurs only sporadically, and, according to some, is missing altogether". If the missionary concept is defined in terms of being sent out to the nations with the message of salvation, then the only passages to be considered are Isaiah 40-55 and the book of Jonah. The essentially missionary character even of these "high points" proves to be not unchallenged. Such missionary consciousness as is evidenced is centripetal, and not centrifugal. What is even more important is that, whatever the extent to which the O.T. has become acquainted with the idea of mission, its realization is reserved to the future age.

Dr. Blauw's third chapter deals with the message of universalism in the O.T. as a Messianic message. Although O.T. expectation of future salvation is by no means always Messianic in character, study of the Messianic figures and concepts of the O.T. clarifies four important points:

"*a)* that the salvation that God has promised to Israel is a *universal* salvation.

"*b)* that this salvation, as an eschatological reality, has never been received by Israel during the whole course of the Old Testament, but only expected;

"*c)* that this eschatological salvation is connected with and finds its expression in the coming of the Messiah;

"*d)* that this universal-eschatological-Messianic salvation is not a consequence of preaching or of witness, but is a *gift* which is granted by God Himself *to* and via the Messiah."

Turning to the N.T., Dr. Blauw first stresses both the continuity of the N.T. with the Old, in respect of this as well of other themes, and also the equally important fact that the N.T. message brings something quite *new*. "In fulfilment, the expectations are not only exceeded but also overtaken, modified, corrected". On the other hand, "the 'new' in the New Testament is illuminated and clarified time and again from the Old Testament, so that we go off irrevocably on the wrong track if we neglect the Old Testament as irrelevant". In this connection, the new thing which the N.T. brings is the centrifugal concept of mission. Before developing this contrast between the Testaments, Dr. Blauw speaks of Jesus, Israel, and the nations, and of the Kingdom, the Apostles, and the Church, bringing out the fact that continuity does not mean identity but includes differences, fulfilment being more than simple fulfilment, and itself leading to new expectations. "The church, insofar as she has taken the place of Israel, by her gathering out of, and by her existence in the midst of, every tribe, tongue and nation, represents the salvation which has come in Christ ... But the difference is that the church no longer merely anticipates, but rather her power is drawn from the very fulfilment in Christ. Nevertheless, the church remains a symbol and anticipation of the hopes for the Kingdom in the fulness of the nations. *Mission* comes into view only in the way in which this hope for the world takes on form in *acts* of proclamation and representation on behalf of Christ."

In his fifth chapter, Dr. Blauw bases his elucidation of the N.T. concept of mission on the notable fact that it is the Resurrection which constitutes the great turning point. The Great Commission is to proclaim the Lordship of the Risen Christ among the nations, and is consequent upon all authority having been given to *Him*. In the concept of 'making disciples' lies a further unfolding of the character of the call to mission. "The total dominion over the total world of men must also come to expression in a total dedication and submission to what Jesus had commanded" — obedience not to a law, but to the Lord Himself. The enduring presence of Christ, promised in Matt. 28 : 20 is to be a presence in and through the Holy Spirit, Himself the agent of mission. The centripetal and centrifugal movements of mission are complementary. "It is Christ Who in and through His community forms the centre to which all are called." On the other hand, the Gospel has to be proclaimed to all mankind, without distinction. "This centrifugal movement can be fully discerned in its rightful significance only if we liberate ourselves from the associations which accompany the word

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'mission' in recent centuries, such associations as East-West, or 'white-non-white', 'overseas', and the like.

Dr. Blauw's argument concerning the relation of mission to world history leads, for a theology of mission, to the following conclusions:

"(1) The proclamation of the Gospel among all nations is a manifestation and provisional actualization of the world dominion of the exalted Christ. It happens by His commission and by the authority of the Holy Spirit.

"(2) The proclamation of the Gospel among all nations is a gift to, and a task of, the *community* out of all nations, which is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets; it is directed to and is itself a sign of the coming consummation of the world.

"(3) The whole existence and the whole life-expression of the community is itself a proclamation to which heaven and earth look forward. In the revelation of salvation to the world and the manifestation of salvation in the community, God's plan for the world is unfolded, His glory revealed, and His glorification, which is the meaning of creation, is realized.

"(4) *Therefore* no bounds (extensive or intensive) have been placed on the task of the community, because the coming of Jesus Christ concerns the whole world and all of the life of men. This implies that everywhere that Christ is unknown, His name must be proclaimed, His dominion be set forth, His 'glory and truth' be revealed. Here lies the theological justification for all proclamation of the Gospel in the world. The only relevant boundary is between those who have heard the Gospel and those who have not yet heard it. The community exists *for* the world, because (and so long as) it is the community of Jesus Christ."

Three topics engage Dr. Blauw in his concluding chapter on "Toward a Theology of Mission". (1) He regards it as theologically illegitimate "to found mission as 'foreign mission' on a correlation between the 'end of days' and the 'ends of the earth', unless the latter is purged of its non-Biblical 'Western' significance. It is a boundary notion which indicates that Christ's dominion knows no geographical boundaries ... The only distinction which is relevant 'to the uttermost parts of the earth' is whether one has heard of Christ or not ... In the Bible, 'far off' and 'near' are much more *heilsgeschichtlich* than geographical distinctions! (Eph. 2:13)." (2) Coming to the question of foreign missions in the last three centuries, Dr. Blauw declares them to have been "a theological necessity, because the proclamation of the gospel in the world is always so. Therefore it was not a historical contingency but rather a *heilsgeschichtlich* progression of the word and work of God on earth, and we shall have to take serious account of it in the years to come. The theological necessity of the proclamation remains the same, but the *heilsgeschichtlich* hour has become *another*

hour". (3) Regarding the specific significance of the proclamation of the Gospel in foreign lands, he approvingly quotes the late Prof. Freytag: "The congregation which waits for the Lord cannot keep its nature if it lets itself be enclosed within the space of one people and does not participate in work and prayer in the proclamation among all nations. If one does not see this, then he cannot do justice either to the task he has with the de-Christianized masses in the sending countries." He states that "the *geographical* factor makes sense only as a *sign* of the recognition of Jesus Christ as the Saviour *of the world* ... Mission reflects in a completely distinctive way, precisely in her crossing of spatial and spiritual boundaries, the existence of the church as a church in and for the world ... It is just in her stepping out of herself that the church is herself and comes to herself." As Dr. Blauw sees it, "a theological reflection on missionary service is possible and extremely necessary, but no 'theology of missions' ". As for a theology of mission, this "cannot be other than a 'theology of the Church' as the people of God called *out* of the world, placed *in* the world, and sent *to* the world". Dr. Blauw summarizes his whole argument in a brilliant exposition of I Peter 2: 9-10.

No such synopsis as this can do justice to Dr. Blauw's work, since on the one hand it is to be judged in its character as a survey and appraisal of the theological work itemised in the extensive notes, while on the other its particular virtues lie in various points of detailed argument. Dr. Blauw has agreed to draw attention, in the introduction to his book, to the paucity of material from systematic theologians on the subject of this study, and also to add a chapter on the issues raised during the inter-Testamental period, particularly by the Wisdom literature which helped to make a transition from a centripetal to a centrigufal concept of mission.

Discussion based upon Dr. Blauw's draft at the Geneva consultation started many other theological hares, which this study will continue to pursue. Among those a few may be identified here. One leapt out from the observation that Hindu missionaries will not aim at making westerners become Hindus but will try to make them Christians with Hindu convictions. Another was seen in the necessity to develop theologically the dialectical relationship between the Church's distance from, and its solidarity with, the world. Then came the thesis that when the Gospel comes to a culture, it undercuts its religious pretensions and works to secularise it, seeking to make the reality of that culture a vehicle of Christian obedience. Another was that there is far more syncretism in the West than in Asia. A valuable one appeared in the suggestion that the modern equivalents of "the nations" in the Bible are the corporate structures of human society, rather than predominantly political entities. A glance was caught of

the fleeting proposition that Jerusalem still has a theological meaning for the Church. There was the assertion that God has truly spoken to various nations each in its own culture and religious cultus, but that only in Christ can we truly understand what God has said to them. As regards a theology of mission, it was suggested that the N.T. gives no common theology of mission, but various outlooks from various writers ; that such a theology may, systematically speaking, belong to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit rather than to the doctrine of the Church ; and that while a differentia of missions may be recognized, it cannot be defined in a basically theological statement. Discussion in the Departmental Working Committee added a call for self-examination on the issue of proselytism, and recognition that we should ask what the Word of God says to us about mission instead of seeking for "a Biblical basis of mission". It was also asked whether, instead of waiting for persons to profess a missionary call, we ought not rather to prevail upon them to recognize a duty.

The Working Committee of the Department has requested Dr. Niles, in the book which he is to write, to give special emphasis to that part of the study which asks what it means *in practice* for the Church in this ecumenical era to discharge its mission to all nations. The answer to this enquiry is to be sought by combining fresh theological reflection on the kind of theories mentioned with the insights and practical issues revealed in the present series of consultations. Existential problems will add such grist to the theological mill as should produce nourishing food from this study ; we hope that it will make it palatable !

It would be unfair to attempt to say much at this stage concerning the book which Dr. Niles is at present drafting. It is to be addressed to laymen who profess the Christian faith, but are unconvinced as to the nature and necessity of the Church's mission. An indication may, however, be given of some of the convictions with which Dr. Niles approaches this task. One is recognition of the fact that whereas we emphasize our need to do evangelism, the Bible emphasizes the world's need to be evangelized. Another is that churches in the West need to receive missionaries, just as those in the East need to send them ; only when both are done can present distortions in the ecumenical task of mission be overcome. He bases his theology of mission on the Trinitarian self-revelation of God, and on the nature of the Kingdom of God, rather than viewing it as an aspect of the life of the Church. He defines evangelism as crossing the frontier between faith and non-faith — a frontier within every man's heart — but mission as additionally involving the crossing of secular frontiers, with the purpose of "belonging" on the other side for the sake of the Gospel. It will be important for Dr. Niles to give theological justification for this differentia of the missionary task within the whole sphere of evangelism, or else to abandon this particular approach.

The End of Churchly Unity?

KEITH R. BRIDSTON

ON the authority of Fowler in *The King's English* a "sleepy reader is the true test" of ambiguity. Some very unsleepy readers found the term "churchly unity" ambiguous when they were asked last spring to comment on it by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft. Taking the advice of this select group of theologians and church leaders, the Commission on Faith and Order dropped the term from its Future Report when it presented it to the Central Committee this past summer in Scotland.

Sleepy readers (if any) of this should not draw the wrong conclusions from the disappearance of "churchly unity" from the official ecumenical jargonary. There were, admittedly, theological objections to it — to some it appeared to depreciate the importance of a consensus of faith. Others thought it best to let it go because it appeared untranslatable into other languages. But perhaps the real reason that decided the point was the simple and unambiguous argument of the Bishop of Bristol, that "churchly" was intended to make "clear that the unity envisaged is one which Christian faith could recognize as growing out of the inherent nature of the Church of Christ and not some alien unity imposed upon Christians from another source than the Gospel itself". Once that was established, "the neologistic adjective" was dropped.

So the year 1960 marked the end of the term "churchly unity". The term, that is. What it represented still remains: the new definition of unity agreed to by the Commission on Faith and Order and now received by the Central Committee of the World Council to be forwarded to the churches for their comment.

"The Commission on Faith and Order understands that the unity which is both God's will and His gift to His Church is one which brings all in each place * who confess

* The word "place" here is used both in its primary sense of local neighbourhood and also, under more modern conditions, of other areas in which Christians need to express unity in Christ, e.g. all those engaged in a local industry.

Christ Jesus as Lord into a fully committed fellowship with one another through one baptism into Him, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel and breaking the one bread, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all ; and which at the same time unites them with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise than ministry and members are acknowledged by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls the Church.

"It is for such unity that we believe we must pray and work. Such a vision has indeed been the inspiration of the Faith and Order movement in the past, and we re-affirm that this is still our goal. We recognize that the brief definition of our objective which we have given above leaves many questions unanswered. In particular we would state emphatically that the unity we seek is not one of uniformity, nor a monolithic power structure, and that on the interpretation and the means of achieving certain of the matters specified in the preceding paragraph we are not yet of a common mind. The achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth for many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice ...

"... It is our strong conviction that to proclaim the essential oneness of the Church of Christ involves facing the question "what kind of unity does God demand of His Church ?" We agree that no one definition of the nature of unity can be a condition of membership in the WCC, but Faith and Order exists in order to stand for the unity of the Church as the will of God and for a ceaseless effort to know what obedience to that will means concretely. Only so can it be "manifest". The WCC can have no "neutrality" on whether that question is answered or not. Clearly the World Council is not in a position to say what the answer is in all its fullness ; if it were, our quest for the "manifest unity" would already be at an end. As the Toronto Statement of 1950 put it : 'As the conversation between the Churches develops, and as the Churches enter into closer contact with each other, they will no doubt have to face new decisions and problems. For the Council exists to break the deadlock between the Churches.' (*ibid.* V.2.) *All* the churches in the Council confront each other under the demand of God Himself that they should learn from Him the nature of the unity which we seek. It has been characteristic of Faith and Order to recognize that patience and thoroughness are needed for this task. But it is also necessary to recognize that in such matters we are not entirely free to proceed at our own pace, that events are forcing upon us various kinds of Christian co-operation, and that if we do not find true unity we shall find ourselves remaining content with a form of organizational unity which leaves unfulfilled many of the central requirements of the Church's life. There is therefore need for a proper sense of urgency lest we lose the time that God gives us. Faith and Order must constantly press upon the Council and the churches the fact that the question of unity is one upon which an answer has to be given, and that to give no answer means to be shut up to the wrong answer."

Condensed as it is, the theological definition of the first paragraph must be judged as much by what it does *not* say as by what it does. Words have been weighed in previous drafts and those found wanting have been omitted. What

remains is a remarkable consensus representing the wide spectrum of theological and confessional positions — from Quaker to Lutheran, from Eastern Orthodox to Baptist — which are found in the Faith and Order Commission and in the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. It is a provisional ecumenical answer to the question: "what kind of unity does God demand of His Church?", as the Future Report puts it.

An Asian member of the Commission called it "the ecumenical equivalent of the Lambeth Quadrilateral" and suggested that it would be taken up by churches engaged in union negotiations as a basis for discussion. This may be an exaggerated evaluation of its importance. Nevertheless, as one of the veteran members of the Commission said in the debate on the definition in the Central Committee, the significance of the sketch which outlines in broad strokes the "picture" of the unity we are seeking should not be underestimated when it has been accepted by such a wide range of viewpoints.

The most useful theological commentaries on the definition itself are the introduction of the Chairman, Dean Douglas Horton, to the Commission's discussion of it (which will appear in the Minutes of that meeting) and the introduction to the discussion of the Central Committee by Professor Henri D'Espine, which appears in the October 1960 number of the *Ecumenical Review*. (Those who are planning study of the definition, for example, in local congregations, would do well to have these documents available as background material, as well as the April 1960 issue of the *Ecumenical Review* which was devoted to this topic.)

The definition is neatly summarized by Professor D'Espine. He said to the Central Committee that it implied:

"1) that there would no longer be in each locality several churches but one church comprising all those in that locality who confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ;

"— that their union would be based on the same baptism and express itself by the preaching of the same Gospel and by participation in the one Bread;

"2) that this local community would be linked to the whole Christian community of all times and of all places by the fact that its ministry and members would be acknowledged by all.

"By its very nature such a unity is visible, but it does not imply a single centralized ecclesiastical institution — which is very generally set aside as being undesirable. It is compatible with a large degree of institutional and liturgical diversity, but is neither 'federal' nor merely 'spiritual'."

The formula is strikingly clear and specific. There has been a good deal of vague and, let it be admitted, sentimental talk about the generalities of church unity in the ecumenical movement. Now the Faith and Order Commission is saying that the time has come to put away such childish things. The time has

come to be quite concrete about the objectives of the ecumenical movement for church unity. As Professor D'Espine pointed out to the Central Committee, however, adopting the definition may involve a choice between the different possible conceptions of unity and the question is : "Are all the member churches of the World Council ready to make such a choice ?" If they are prepared to agree, it "would indubitably represent a step forward in the pursuit of unity" ; if they are not, however, there is a danger of confirming the general impression that the ecumenical situation in this matter is one of "stagnation".

Even though the definition clearly has to do with ultimate objectives, therefore, it raises quite immediate and existential questions for decision by the member churches of the World Council at this time.

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And it is here that it may be useful to review the reasons why the Faith and Order Commission has felt moved to pose such a difficult, and potentially explosive, issue for ecumenical consideration. The answer can be given very simply in the words of the Faith and Order constitution describing the function of the Commission :

> "To proclaim the essential oneness of the Church of Christ and to keep prominently before the World Council and the Churches the obligation to manifest that unity."

For it was in the scrutiny and re-assessment of its constitutional functions that Faith and Order drew up this definition of church unity, and made it a part of its Future Report.

Those responsible for this Future Report believed that in order to fulfil the function of "proclaiming" the oneness of the Church relevantly it was necessary to assess the present ecumenical situation. That is the significance of the paragraphs which follow the definition proper. They describe the "changed circumstances" which the World Council of Churches through its Commission on Faith and Order must face in proclaiming the unity of the Church. Faith and Order's original purpose as a movement for helping the churches to realize God's will for unity is considered still valid but these changed circumstances demand a "fuller statement of this purpose".

One might fasten on several points in the definition to illustrate this. Within the limited space allowed here it may be sufficient to mention two, both having to do with the phrase "in each place".

The first, as Professor D'Espine says, is the note of visibility. This is no novelty for the Faith and Order Commission has the constitutional duty "to keep prominently before" both the churches and the World Council "the obligation to *manifest*" the unity of the Church of Christ. Since the ecumenical movement is concerned with the divisions between the churches — which are quite visible — it is obvious that it must in *some* sense be concerned with visible unity. Indeed, as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has written in the introduction to the new edition of *The Reunion of the Church*, the World Council itself "is a form — an immensely effective and impressive form — of visible unity in Christ". At the same time, the Toronto Statement of 1950 asserts that the World Council "does not prejudge the ecclesiological problem", pointing out that it "includes Churches which believe that the Church is essentially invisible as well as those which hold that visible unity is essential".

This poses a nice dilemma for ecumenical pundits. There are a number of ways of getting off its horns. The words "visible" and "invisible" have been invested over the centuries with so much controversial content that they might better be abandoned altogether. They should not in any case carelessly be considered as interchangeable with the biblical distinction between "flesh" and "spirit", a point made tellingly years ago by Charles Gore in *The Mission of the Church* (1892). At least in this context could not one legitimately distinguish theologically between the classical problem of the visibility of the Church and the new ecumenical one of the visibility of unity? They are not quite the same. It may be an ecclesiological hair worth splitting. Again, one might well reconsider the authority of the Toronto Statement: it is not irreformable, and the new Faith and Order definition may well be posing a case which the Toronto Statement framers themselves anticipated — that is, one demanding "new decisions" as the conversations between the churches develop.

Whatever the answer to these questions may be, it is clear that the churches *are* visibly divided, the ecumenical movement *is* for the manifestation of church unity, and this means that the *status quo*, as Dr. Visser 't Hooft told the students at the WSCF Conference at Strasbourg, cannot be accepted "as a sufficient answer". In other words, a theory of invisible unity cannot be the rationale for the continuance of visible disunity.

Against this background the relation between the "changed circumstances" and Professor D'Espine's reference to the danger of ecumenical stagnation can be appreciated. The obvious "master" change, but perhaps so obvious that it has been neglected, is the fact that the ecumenical movement is older than it once was — still a great fact but not quite so new. Fifty years have passed since the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and even by the lengthy measure of church history that is a considerable period of time. One need only compare the same

span of time in another era — for example the Reformation period of 1510 to 1560 — to realize how much *can* happen in fifty years and put the so-called "ecumenical reformation" in its proper perspective. And what will church history say about this next fifty years in regard to church unity — revolution or stagnation ?

To speak of the dangers of stagnation does not mean, of course, that the ecumenical movement is already completely bogged down. It does mean that in many ways the high hopes which were invested in the movement, especially as a movement for visible church unity, have not been realized. The early enthusiasm has gradually diminished and in its place has come a more sober, though one hopes a no less committed, ecumenical concern. For better or for worse, the "primitive" period of the history of the ecumenical movement is past. One could detect this change of climate, for example, in the somewhat nostalgic words of Archbishop Yngve Brilioth to the Faith and Order Conference at Lund in 1952 when he reminded us of the "burning zeal" of Charles Brent and the need to keep alive his vision of unity "even when this vision seems to recede to a remote distance".

In other words, fifty years of ecumenical movement could be interpreted as the change of progressive disillusionment. This is nothing to be surprised at. Indeed, disillusionment is healthy and necessary insofar as it means putting aside illusions and replacing them with something better. To that extent, the Faith and Order movement was fated to be one of the chief factors of ecumenical disillusionment, precisely by being committed to deal with the *differences* in doctrine and organization between the churches — even if the pioneers did not fully comprehend these implications.

Ironically, the Life and Work leaders were perhaps more aware of this than their Faith and Order fellows when they declined the first overtures for closer collaboration between the two movements in 1922 on the grounds that the "realization of the ideal of the Faith and Order movement must be comparatively remote". They in their turn were fully confident that their approach promised much quicker results because : "the Christian communions can without difficulty unite here and now in the application of Christian ethics and the spirit of Christ to the problems of the present day". But the Life and Work approach based on the thesis that "Doctrine divides, but service unites" eventually proved no more capable of producing immediate results in the realm of church unity than had the Faith and Order approach.

Even the limited perspective provided by fifty years of ecumenical history makes it evident to us that both the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements, in spite of their different approaches to the problem of Christian unity unconsciously shared the nineteenth-century spirit of evolutionary optimism and

a quiet, but firm, faith in inevitable historical progress. Now we have come to a point in a more cynical age where some ask: is it not a possible thesis that these two movements, having failed to accomplish their original purposes, joined together and formed a World Council of Churches? Is the World Council itself a magnificent monument of ecumenical despair?

Let us say, for the sake of argument, that it is not — that it is a sign of hope and renewal. But, even so, may we not admit that it might become such a monument — that it might become a dangerously convenient escape from the hard demands of manifesting the true and full unity of the Church of Christ? This, indeed, is precisely what those who formulated the definition of church unity now before us are asking. And they are saying enough to suggest very clearly that, whatever else may be said about the World Council of Churches, it is not the fullness of unity for which the ecumenical movement has prayed and worked. That unity must be churchly, to come back to the banned word.

In other words, the very institutionalization of the World Council as an embodiment of Christian unity represents a change which requires a fuller statement of what the ecumenical movement understands by unity. Or, as the Future Report puts it, "the question of unity is one upon which an answer has to be given" because "to give no answer means to be shut up to the wrong answer". There can be no "neutrality" on this issue. What is meant by this? Among other things, that the institutional momentum of the ecumenical movement places us in a situation where we see "we are not entirely free to proceed at our own pace, that events are forcing upon us various kinds of Christian co-operation, and that if we do not find true unity we shall find ourselves remaining content with a form of organizational unity which leaves unfulfilled many of the central requirements of the Church's life".

This really amounts to saying that the old question of visible or invisible unity is outdated. The relevant and existential question facing us after fifty years of ecumenical development is what *kind* of visible unity? The fact is that we are surrounded by all kinds of visible church unity. A local congregation, a denomination, a council of churches, are all forms of visible unity. But taken together they spell out visible disunity. And if we believe that there is only one Church of Christ in the world then we must take all these embodiments of unity together. Unless, that is, we affirm that only one is the true embodiment of unity, which would mean that the problem of disunity did not really exist.

As has been said, fifty years of ecumenical disillusionment might lead the ecumenical movement into a position of complete stagnation. It is perfectly evident that attempts to escape this stagnation by appeals to the traditional watch-words of the old ecumenical idealism are bound to fail. Ortega y Gasset has pointed out that every idealism tends to be de-humanizing because it is never

big enough to comprehend the reality it is supposed to represent: "The real thing always overflows the concept that is supposed to hold it." Talk which tries to rekindle the ecumenical fires with anything analogous to Mott's idealistic revivalism, to take one example, falls on deaf ears — not necessarily because this generation is less pioneering than its predecessors but because its pioneering has to be done at the end of fifty years of ecumenical history and not at the beginning, and the old ecumenical idealism cannot "hold" the last fifty years of ecumenical history.

The Faith and Order statement speaks of the need for a "proper sense of urgency". This indicates that recognition of ecumenical change does not imply succumbing to a spirit of stagnation. The spirit of urgency is, however, derived from other sources than the old ecumenical ideologies. It is not based on hopes of ecumenizing the world in this generation, nor on the genial principle that God's work of uniting the Church should be accelerated by discreet ecumenical proddings. Rather it is grounded in the realistic recognition that the ecumenical movement for visible unity is in grave danger of being interred in visible forms of Christian co-operation and organizational unity which leave "unfulfilled many of the central requirements of the Church's life".

The Faith and Order definition is, therefore, very much a reflection of the present ecumenical situation — of the fact that the ecumenical movement has been so successful, of the fact that it is entering a precarious transitional stage of institutionalization, of the fact that great new office buildings are going up to house its different organizations, of all the facts, indeed, which show that Christian unity is becoming ever more visible and therefore ever more in danger of being imprisoned in false forms. The urgency of the cry for "churchly unity", therefore, arises not so much out of hope as out of disillusionment, not out of dreams of a panacea but out of wide-awake fears of the alternatives to true unity. Those whose residual idealism is disturbed by this dialectical spirit are invited to provide a more profound answer to the ecumenical dilemma of this age — but it must be for this age and not one of fifty years ago, or even ten. The realm of Faith and Order is also one of rapid ecumenical change.

This new realism is nailed down by the second note implicit in the phrase "in each place" — locality. Bishop Dun of Washington pointed out to the Central Committee that the vision of unity which leaders of the churches caught at ecumenical meetings should not blind them to the fact that most Christians only had the grim sight of Christian division to live by. However happily the ecclesiastical dignitaries consorted on ecumenical occasions, the fact was that they represented denominational machinery, "principalities and powers", which produced separated bodies of Christians "in each place".

If every local congregation may be seen as a microcosm of the Church of Christ, so most communities may be seen as microcosms of the universal state of Christian disunity. A World Council of Churches may be organized, its Central Committee meet, a new headquarters arise, but unless "in each place" this unity becomes visible what does it signify? For the ordinary Christian such forms of visible unity are hardly more immediate than the pictures of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of St. John, and certainly less inspiring.

The Faith and Order statement, therefore, presses the point of locality to go along with that of visibility. For whatever problems of Christian disunity the World Council of Churches (or any other similar ecumenical body) may solve, it does not automatically resolve the ecumenical problem of disunity "in each place" — not even, it should be added, in Geneva!

One of the delightful misprints to come out of the recent meetings at St. Andrews was the one which turned "a fully committed fellowship" of the Faith and Order definition into "committee fellowship". An exhausted member of the Central Committee, which had been deluged with over 2,000 stencilled pages of reports, muttered as he left for home: "The kingdom of God can't be like this!" One might add: can even church unity be?

In the face of the encroaching tide of ecumenical bureaucratization the Faith and Order definition is a timely warning filled with familiar words: "confess", "baptism", "faith", "preaching", "bread", "ministry", "members". In short, it mirrors a churchly unity in each place — a homely unity, a diversified unity, a decentralized unity.

It is obvious that there are many images of church unity in circulation. Some are innocuous, many are misleading, a few are frightening. Altogether they are confusing because when one refers to church unity today it is never quite certain which image is being called to mind and it is therefore extraordinarily difficult to know why people are for or against it. Some are for church unity for apparently wrong reasons, and others are against church unity for right reasons. In this maelstrom of images the ecumenical ship is in constant danger of losing its bearings and running aground.

In a recent issue of the *Christian Century* I have tried to suggest the need for an ecumenical self-image, one that contains the dynamism of movement within it. This period of change and transition requires a common ecumenical image of church unity, shared by the churches, which does justice to the biblical and theological principles worked out by Faith and Order over the years and is clear and homely enough to be seen and understood as applying to every locality. If this new Faith and Order definition helps to provide such an image, if it makes the question of church unity existential for every body of Christians

"in each place" who must live, work, pray, witness together — or separately, it will have gone far to serve the purpose intended by its framers.

* * *

The simple words "in each place", then, with their stress on visibility and locality epitomize the response of Faith and Order to the changes wrought by fifty years of ecumenical disenchantment. It may be considered a "new wave" of ecumenological realism which comprehends both the original "primitive" passion for church unity and the present disillusionment about the immediacy of realizing those primal visions. In that sense, it is more radical in its challenge to the state of disunity among the churches than the placid evolutionary idealism of the ecumenical pioneers, who did not anticipate the irony of the ecumenical movement itself becoming potentially the most subtle matrix of ecumenical stagnation.

This "new wave" of ecumenical realism has the theological tensile strength to hold the dialectic of passion and disillusionment together through its incarnational character. Or, to put it another way, this is a sacramental as contrasted to an idealistic ecumenology. It is firmly anti-docetic in its interpretation of the ecumenical problem of church unity. It speaks of "corporate life" showing that Christians are not disembodied souls, any more than their Lord who came in the flesh, and their common life "in each place" cannot be disembodied either. This is what lies behind the words : "The achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth for many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice."

This, at least, is the conviction of the Faith and Order Commission in this year of 1960. Now the churches are invited to answer this challenge. Some of the questions which must be faced are :

If visible unity is considered unnecessary, would it also be agreed that the present visible disunities are also unnecessary ? If unity need not be embodied, why embody the disunity in separate denominations ?

If visible unity is considered necessary, how much visibility is required ? in each place ? universally ? What degree of uniformity does visible unity imply and must this necessarily mean a "monolithic power structure" ?

The Faith and Order statement admits that it has left "many questions unanswered", and that "on the interpretation and the means of achieving certain of the matters specified ... we are not yet of a common mind". The challenge has been laid down with a sense of urgency and it will be a revealing indication of the degree of ecumenical stagnation existing among the churches today to see with what sense of urgency that challenge is met.

Providence and History

A PROPOSAL FOR ECUMENICAL STUDY

The following is a provisional draft of the proposal which the Division of Studies plans to put to the New Delhi Assembly concerning a major study to be undertaken in the future. Comments upon this proposal would be greatly appreciated.

THE Committee of the Division of Studies proposes that between the Third and Fourth Assemblies a study be undertaken regarding the ways in which God works in history and the relationship thereto of conscious Christian obedience.

During the five years since Evanston, some eleven major studies have been carried out under the aegis of the Division. They have dealt with important aspects of the Church's mission, its work in society, its evangelistic witness and its unity. Two of the studies — that on the Lordship of Christ over the World and the Church and that on Christians and the Prevention of War in an Atomic Age — have been the direct responsibility of the Divisional Committee. The others have been carried on under the auspices of the departments of the Division, viz. Faith and Order, Church and Society, Evangelism and Missionary Studies.

As one now reviews the documents produced during the past five years by the various groups of laymen and women, pastors and theologians in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, it is evident that from their various standpoints and perspectives all are wrestling with the relationship between basic Biblical categories and the rapidly changing world situation. There is a remarkable convergence of attention and concern upon such questions as: How does God work in the world? How may his activity be recognized? How may man cooperate with him? What has the Church to say and do about the notable scientific achievements and the political and social revolutions of this turbulent epoch?

In essence these questions derive from the age-old problem of Providence and history, a problem which each generation has to face anew for itself in the light of the contemporary situation. But it has a special urgency today in view of the many catastrophic events which have occurred, the rapidity of the changes

Ernest A. Payne, vice-Chairman of the Central Committee, and new Chairman
ie Division of Studies, shows here in the procession of the Central Committee
Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, August, 1960

which have taken place and man's consequent intellectual confusion and spiritual need. Upon an answer to these questions, and to many others that spring from them, depends our understanding of the specific forms in which the church undertakes its tasks and also the manner of our response to particular situations and challenges.

It is a basic Christian belief that God is active in human history, as Creator, Judge, Redeemer and Perfector. "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King" (Isaiah 33 : 22). As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts (cf. Isaiah 55 : 9), yet we speak with assurance about His saving work in Christ and through the means of grace in the Church. When, however, we try to recognize and make contact with God's presence in specific events in the life of the Church, and even more so in events in the world at large, Christians tend to be divided and baffled, or fall prey to obviously oversimplified identifications of God's providential activity — whether to save or to destroy — in particular occurrences. Many Christians, however, are today too deeply aware of the ambiguities of history to subscribe to any simple pattern equating what takes place with God's providential governance of the world. Many Christians and non-Christians, on the other hand, while impatient with too much pre-occupation with the past and often irresponsible in their attitude to the present, show a wistful hunger for a sense of continuity and for guidance as to the meaning of events.

The Pharisees were rebuked by our Lord for their failure to "discern the signs of the times" (Matt. 16 : 1 ff. Cf. Luke 12 : 5 ff.). The disciples were reminded that it was not for them to know "the times or the seasons, which the Father hath in his own power" (Acts 1 : 7. Cf. Matt. 24 : 36). They were exhorted, however, to constant watchfulness (Matt. 24 : 24) and were assured of power for the task of world wide witness (Acts 1 : 8). "Prove the spirits whether they are of God", said the Apostle (I John 4 : 1).

The Committee believes that a study of the kind it has in mind would involve the de-mythologizing of certain traditional Christian interpretations of history, a critique of certain secular interpretations now widely current, and a fresh attempt to understand what God now wills and how Christians may act responsibly and obediently thereto. There is need for :

1) An examination of some of the false ideas about God's relation to history. The primary concern should not be philosophical and ideological theories, though these cannot be ignored, but the popular assumptions and axioms which influence conduct, e.g. naive, egocentric providentialism ; attempts to identify God's will either with the *status quo* in society or with the aims of revolutionary and rebellious movements ; immanental or evolutionary views of the Kingdom of God ; apocalypticism, with its speculations and calculations of the "day of

the Lord" ; messianisms, which proclaim some religious or political leader or movement as a revelation supplementary to that in Christ ; views of history which are exclusively church-centered or rest content with private religiosity.

2) An examination of non-Christian misinterpretations of history, several of which exercise widespread influence at the present time even among Christians, e.g. determinism and indeterminism, which alike deny that history is God's history and that man, whether he knows and accepts it or not, is God's servant, sharing in the shaping of mankind's destiny ; pessimism and optimistic evolutionism, the latter taking today a quasi-religious form in beliefs — whether communist, socialist or capitalist — in the saving power of economic progress ; denial of the reality of history, as in Buddhism and certain forms of Hinduism (though the attempts of these religions in their reviving form to come to terms with the contemporary world should be noted) ; the attempt to escape involvement in the contemporary situation by means of egotism and hedonism.

3) An examination of the Biblical doctrine of history, particularly as set forth in the Old Testament, together with a study of the meaning in the Bible and for the current world of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. How far can one apply the pattern of God's activity presented in the Old Testament to post-Biblical events ? What is the relation of *Heilsgeschichte* to general history ? What is the task of the Church in the world ? Popular ideas of progress and certain expectations regarding the Kingdom of God based thereon call here for examination.

4) A study of the ways in which we believe God has acted on particular occasions and through particular men and movements, bearing in mind that He acts often in hidden ways and may use unexpectedly for His purposes those who have been wrong and misguided, making the wrath of man to praise Him.

5) An attempt to present in as clear and compelling a fashion as possible a theology of Christian action for the twentieth century, based on the recognition that we, like our predecessors, stand under the judgment and mercy of God. What does it mean to be "called to be saints" (I Cor. 1 : 2), God's men and women, in the modern world ?

This is clearly a very wide-ranging subject. Certain aspects of it might become the responsibility of the Division. Others might be dealt with by the different Departments of the Division or by Departments of other Divisions, where it impinges on their particular interests. It is important that it should not become a merely theoretical or academic study, for at many points matters of urgent pastoral concern are involved. In a number of cases, issues similar to those mentioned above have already been raised in departmental reports and discussions. Were a study of this kind embarked upon cooperatively, there would need to be a careful co-ordination of the work, initially, while it was in progress, and in the concluding stages.

So far as the Departments of the Division of Studies are concerned, the relevance of the general subject may be illustrated as follows:

A. *Faith and Order*. The Interim Report of the Theological Commission on Christ and the Church has already stated that further study must be given to "the 'ways' in which Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are present and at work in the Church. What is the meaning of the 'presence' of Christ and the Spirit? How is that presence related to the immediate action of Christ and the Spirit, to the unique historical foundation of the Church, and to the Church's subsequent history? How is the work of Christ and the Spirit mediated and discerned in human life?... What is the meaning and character of community as formed among men by the Spirit?"

The unity and disunity of the Church can be seen in retrospect to have been affected by wider developments in the life of mankind. The story is confused at every turn by Christian disobedience as well as obedience. The Church is still called to the prophetic role of discerning the hand of God and submitting to it, and of discerning disobedience and condemning it. If, as we must believe, God is the author of unity, it must be a unity of faith and fellowship rather than an imposed unity. It is a unity embracing all human interests and activities, but is one that in its nature is radically different from that which may be secured on occasion and over certain areas of life by sinister forces and means.

1) How are we to evaluate the fact that modern means of communication, both physical and mental, are making this "one world" in all its aspects? For the first time in history, the Church has the possibility of being organised on a global basis in hitherto undreamed-of completeness. How far is this to be seen as a magnificent possibility, or as a grave danger? What are the lessons, positive and negative, of the Church of Rome?

2) The very possibility of global permeation by certain forces (e.g. technological methods of production and distribution) forces us to ask what are the virtues of variety and decentralization. What forms of church life best express these virtues without being merely reactionary? e.g. the legitimacy of a folk-church, or even a national church.

3) The rapidly changing balance of power between the white races and the African and Asian peoples challenges the long hegemony of Graeco-Latin culture. Can that changing balance enrich the church life of the West? Need Afro-Asian nationalism repeat the excessive nationalism of some Western churches?

4) On a global basis, the total Christian forces constitute a minority (certainly not greater than $^1/_3$, and likely to become less relatively, if non-European populations continue to increase in present proportions). How can a minority-Christendom carry over into the new age the valid insights of Christians regarding their

role in society as a whole — e.g. what relation to the State ought uniting churches to seek to secure? Can the assurance as to their place in the scheme of things felt by the Christian minorities of the second century A.D. be recovered?

B. *Church and Society*. "All the revolutions of this world take place in some fashion under God's providence to serve the final goals of the Divine will of love ... The conviction that God is at work in this momentous revolution among men means a calling to the churches to work with Him in it." So said the report of the Thessalonica Conference on Rapid Social Change.

Several features in the modern world situation are entirely new to human experience and force men to look again at the traditional views of God's Providence and His action in social movements. New economic prosperity and increasing political responsibility are making men masters of their environment in new ways. They become aware of how much depends on planning and on their own conscious decisions. At the same time there are many who feel impotent and frustrated, uncertain where the centers of knowledge and effective power really are, or whether indeed such really exist.

In a world where men had to accept poverty as inevitable and their social environment as incapable of improvement or alteration by their own volition, it was natural to adopt a dependent attitude. God was brought in to explain what could not be controlled; men prayed when they were unable to engage in effective action. Today Christians have to ask how and where God is at work in the large scale operations which men can themselves undertake to alter their physical and material environment. They have to choose between various practical alternatives as to both ends and means and they want to know how to direct their choice. They need clearer motives about God's relation to the processes of change in which they are involved. The element of the mysterious remains in such things as natural calamities, sudden rises in population, the coming of sudden "winds of change", sometimes incarnated in individuals, sometimes moving whole nations and continents. There is also the effect of human wickedness. However clearly the will of God may be at work in the new coming of age of Asia and Africa, in the general increase in prosperity, in the breakdown of traditional class structures and the claims of all races for equal treatment, there are also darker forces at work. No doubt God can make use of and transform man's sin, as well as use his obedience. But for the ordinary man the insistent questions remain: What is God's will in contemporary changes? How can we recognize it? How can we know we are doing our best to further it? What does the Christian stewardship of gifts and resources involve in the present situation?

Put more concretely, we may ask: Has God willed that men should abolish poverty in the world? Is God at work in the growth of nationalism in Asia and

Africa, and in the demands for 'democracy'? Does God work in the secular movements where men study and plan to control their destiny? in Communism and the changed structure of society it involves?

C. *Missionary Studies.* "The profound change in the balance of cultural and political power as between the nations of Europe and America and those of the rest of the world, and the development of much more effective means of contact between the different parts of the world, have made it impossible to use many of the arguments for missions which were common in a former day. It is simply impossible to suggest to the intelligent western Christian of today that in going from Europe to Asia he is going from light to darkness ... We should undertake the costly but exciting task of finding out what is the pattern of the Church's mission in the new day in which God has been pleased to put us. This is not, first, a matter of organisation — though questions of organisation necessarily arise in their proper place. It is a matter of fundamental theological thinking and Bible study, and of discerning the signs of the times." So it is suggested in one of the documents dealing with the theology of mission.

The resurgence of the non-Christian religions gives a new urgency to the consideration of this subject by the missionary movement. It is true that the missionary movement as a whole has been intent on obedience to God's will rather than concerned about the nature of God's activity. The content of divine revelation rather than the interpretation of history has been its driving force, and this remains true, though there is today a greater interest than formerly in the theology of mission in itself. Clearly theology and Christian obedience must not be set in antithesis. Moreover, missionary activity through the centuries has clearly been deeply influenced by different theological systems as well as by contemporary events and trends, by predominantly secular as well as by religious movements. There is need to uncover this and also to make clear the ambivalent nature of all secular history. The missionary movement must never become identified with secular goals, however legitimate these may be in themselves.

The large scale study of the Word of God and the Church's Missionary Obedience, already embarked upon by the Department, should contribute to a clearer understanding of the central and abiding missionary motive. It should also help to re-emphasize the responsibility the Church has to teach "all nations" (Matt. 28 : 19 ; cf. Luke 24 : 47), that is, all the varied races and families of men, where every variety and differentiation are to be seen as part of "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3 : 10), "who hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17 : 26), and into whose Heavenly City "the glory and honour of the nations" are to be brought (Rev. 21 : 26).

D. *Evangelism.* The report entitled "A Theological Reflection on the Work of Evangelism" declares that the Church is summoned anew today "to understand what God is doing in these times through all the changes that are taking place in the ways and circumstances of human life, to penetrate into the significance of the new forms of association in which persons find their social satisfaction, to ask how the Gospel may be related to men in their several needs as they seek to come to terms with life".

As they undertake their evangelistic task the churches need to place themselves under the judgment and criticism of a theology of history of wide horizons. How are they to read the signs of the times? Are there hindrances and obstacles today as a result of the traditional structures of church life? Must there be substantial outward change as well as inner renewal? Many of the traditional protective structures of common life, such as the large family and the closely-knit neighbourhood parish, have vanished. Modern industrial man is rootless and a wanderer, an impersonal unit in a "lonely crowd".

What should be the churches' evangelising strategy as it proclaims the Gospel in such a time? Should it be that of individual conversion and the rescue of the convert from the tyranny of the structures of modern enslavement, the church a haven of the saved? Or should the strategy, while never belittling individual conversion, mean as well, or at times first of all, presenting the call of the Gospel as enlistment in the warfare against "principalities and powers" within and outside church walls? The proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord of the world and Lord of the Church, as well as personal Saviour, have considerable practical consequences.

To what extent is modern technological culture an enemy of the Gospel, voicing deserved judgments upon the churches? To what extent is it opening doors for fresh proclamations of the Gospel? What would marching out into the world, and specially the training of the laity for that march, mean by way of new evangelizing strategies? May nostalgia for a cultural era for ever gone be a major obstacle to faithful evangelism today?

* * *

The remarkable consensus of interest and concern which these departmental notes indicate emphasises the timeliness of a fresh study of the general theme: Providence and History. Ecumenical conversation thereon may well provide important new insights. The Ecumenical Movement is itself a new factor on the stage of history, the significance of which deserves attention.

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